

The Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

Executive Registry


84 - 9221/4

2 October 1984

NOTE FOR: Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

Bud:

The Director thought that the attached back-ground information on the Mexican Estimate might be useful for the President and Vice President should they be asked questions regarding it.


John N. McMahon

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Attachment: a/s
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Central Intelligence Agency

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84- 9221/3

1 October 1984

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: John Horton and the Mexico Estimate

The idea for a new National Intelligence Estimate on Mexico originated with concerns in the Intelligence Community in 1982 over the course of developments in Mexico and later expressed by the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board during 1983 as well as by a number of people in the private sector. Accordingly, the National Estimate was initiated in August, 1983.

The analyst who wrote the first draft of the estimate did so

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of his research. As a result the analyst (a 20 year plus veteran on Mexico and Latin America) prepared a draft which developed new information and conveyed a heightened sense of urgency over the prospects for destabilization in Mexico over the next several years.

That first draft was rewritten four times before it ever left the National Intelligence Council, twice at the behest of Mr. Horton. Altogether, the paper was revised nine times. The DCI offered comments on two of those nine versions. At each stage, senior managers were concerned that the new information and the heightened sense of urgency in the original draft not be so watered down in interagency coordination as to blunt the message to the policymaker that Mexico's problems were serious.

The estimate was discussed at two National Foreign Intelligence Board meetings by the heads of all the intelligence agencies. The discussions were exceptionally detailed with each of the principals offering his own view. The record demonstrates agreement on the seriousness of Mexico's problems, but disagreement on the strength of the destabilizing forces, the strength of the traditional Mexican system and the imminence of serious problems. No view was ignored or overridden. Indeed,

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the very first paragraph of the Key Judgments of the estimate struck a balanced tone, making clear that there are great underlying strengths in the Mexican system, that it will also face unprecedented stresses and problems during the next several years, and that there are dangers inherent in this situation. The second paragraph of the Key Judgments then recorded the dissenting views of nearly half of the agencies of the Intelligence Community whose principals felt that the situation was not as serious as the main text suggested. This alternative view was explained in depth in the Key Judgments. A range of alternative views was examined in the main text.

The published version of the estimate demonstrates that allegations that the estimate was skewed for policy purposes are totally false. All points of view are fully represented. Indeed, Mr. Horton himself has acknowledged that the final version of the estimate was adequate.

Mr. Horton has complained that the "process" left him uncomfortable and that he had felt "leaned on". There was a struggle involving some of Mr. Horton's colleagues in the National Intelligence Council as well as a number of other people and agencies over the wording of the Estimate. But writing national estimates and intelligence analysis involves rough and tumble disputes concerning important issues of deadly seriousness to the United States. Analysts and managers bring strong views to these issues and one of the greatest challenges to managers of the intelligence process is to ensure that all of those views are given consideration -- but above all that conventional wisdom is tested and that policymakers are alerted to potential dangers or problems. This was done on the Mexico estimate. Differing views were forthrightly stated after a long and sometimes turbulent debate. The integrity of the estimating process was maintained.